Abstract of the Disclosure

A modular latch assembly having at least one control element having one path of motion in which a ratchet is moved to an unlatched position and another path of motion in which the ratchet is not so moved, the path of motion taken by the control element dependent upon whether an engagement element is extended into engagement with the control element or retracted from engagement therewith. Preferably, the control element moves the ratchet by contact with a pawl which itself can be engaged with the ratchet. A manual override can be installed for manually shifting an engagement element into and out of engagement with a control element to place the control element in latched and unlatched states as desired. The latch assembly is preferably provided with a number of different control element positions for receiving control elements therein, each of which is actuatable to move the pawl when in an unlocked state. The number of control elements selected, their selected positions in the latch assembly, and their connection arrangement to input elements are highly flexible, providing latch adaptability to a large number of applications and latch functionalities. The latch assembly preferably has elements arranged and assembled in layers to increase assembly ease and speed. A highly preferred embodiment of the invention includes an automatic unlocking circuit powered by a backup power source.

X:\clientb\087801\9004\A0737413.1